

Editorial

This special edition results from the first face-to-face conference of the South African Missiological Society (SAMS), held at the University of Stellenbosch, after the first identified case of COVID-19 and subsequent lockdowns and its different levels of protocols in South Africa. The COVID pandemic revealed South African society's dire economic, social, and political challenges that the government could not address adequately. The nature of the Church, during the hard lockdowns, also became challenging, as those used to being Church behind their church "walls" were challenged for its relevance in society during increased unemployment, entrenchments of employees, mass deaths, and increased corruption, and crime levels, especially GBV to be on the rise. In its first face-to-face conference, it became essential to discuss the nature of the Church as God's mission agents in the world again. The Church's agency is not in isolation but in collaboration with society, government, and non-governmental institutions. How should the Church then position itself in which it would, with the government, address social ills? The contributors in this special edition want to understand what are the reasons why the Church is not able to enter into a social contract with the state, and others would suggest how the Church could achieve this, while others would reflect on the role of missiology for such a vision and ideal. The first author Nelus Niemandt was the keynote speaker during the David Bosch Memorial Lecture, and in light of the theme, he asked how missiology should position itself in the future if it wants to be relevant and enter into a new social contract with the state. Nelus Niemandt attends to David Bosch's (1995) last publication, *Believing in the future: Towards a missiology of Western culture*, and uses his work as a guide to formulate prospects for missiology as a theological discipline. Following Bosch, he uses an exploration of current events as a heuristic semiotic to discern the future of the Church and to develop prospects for missiology. There are at least four authors, Paul Gundani, Doret Niemandt, Pieter Verster, and Ross Anderson, that focus specifically on the church, congregation and church leaders. Gundani uses a biographical narrative approach to study how the Rev Dr Nolbert Kunonga, when the opportunity arose to take hands with the society in Zimbabwe, dismally failed in his task for various reasons, including the lack of vision, and to apply ethical leadership. Doret Niemandt, using a case study, argues that the challenge between the unaddressed problems in society has much to do with the "culture of congregations", and should the congregation re-imagine their role and task, they would be able to work more closely with society and members outside of their four walls. Verster argues that to re-establish a social contract between the Church and society, the Church must understand itself as the body of Christ that must be "broken" in the world if it wants to establish new rela-

tions with all people. He also stresses that the Church should undoubtedly be a servant church, and the Church should be prophetic in the world. Ross Anderson laments the failed witness of the Evangelical Church in South Africa and that the white evangelical Church needs to repent of theological error and its consequent sinful withdrawal from socio-political issues. The last two contributors, Kritzinger and Mangayi, provide some frameworks for mission and missiology and deal with the themes in a very pragmatic way. Kritzinger examines the terms *ikbaya* and *oikos*, and the notion of covenanting together to build a home across the fault lines that divide society. It uses a seven-point praxis matrix to reflect on the way in which a group of theologians could covenant together to overcome the fault line of racism to build a 'deracial' home. Mangayi, in this contribution, delves into two value frameworks namely, "The Golden Rule and Ubuntu" that embrace both religion and culture and their implications for the Church in mission with God in the public sphere to demonstrate value-based responses to address exclusion and marginalisation. We hope this edition will be utilised by church leaders, mission practitioners, social workers, government officials, and theological students, in their aid to address the social problems in South Africa, but also other parts of the world. A huge thanks to all the contributors to this edition.

Prof E (Eugene) Baron
Guest Editor